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FORTUNE'S WHEEL AND BOETHIUS

Mr. Stanley L. Galpin's letter in *Modern Language Notes* for February (pp. 62-63), quoting the passage from the Old French poem *Les Échecs Amoureux* concerning Fortune's wheel, is interesting but gives rise to some objections and comment. He speaks of the poet "advising people to shun the periphery which moves so fast, and to remain as close as possible to the hub where the motion is much less." He considers this the "application of centrifugal force to the wheel of Fortune."

First, it is evident from the passage he quotes that there is no reference to the "centrifugal force" of the wheel at all. People are not scattered to the rim; there is no emphasis on the difficulty of getting to the center. Secondly, we are not by any means sure that the whole wheel is really under the dominion of Fortune. The person who wishes to escape from the perils of the world where Fortune reigns, is advised to seek the center of this wheel, where, presumably, Fortune does not reign. At the rim, to be sure, there is plenty of "whirling up and down," but at the center is peace and "vertu." This is enough to recall to mind a parallel conception that Mr. Galpin himself may have had in mind but did not wish to include in his short note. I refer to the familiar figure of the wheel of Fate and Providence in Boethius (*Cons. Phil.*, Bk. IV, pr. VI, 61-77, ed. Peiper). The parallel is even more striking when one takes into consideration the gloss found on this passage in a Latin commentary in a manuscript of the late tenth or eleventh centuries, and doubtless as early as the latter part of the ninth century, since it was used by Alfred. (Scholia of Monacensis 19452 Saec. X-XI to IV pr. VI 110, 61 ff. Zu König Alfreds 'Boethius,' Dr. Georg Schepss. *ASNS.*, 94, 153. Alfred's expansion and development of the passage is suggestive.)

In neither of the parallel passages above referred to, is there a substitution of Fortune for Fate, and so they differ essentially from the Old French treatment. On the other hand,

Fate is not so clearly distinguished from Fortune in Boethius that a poet could not easily substitute the one for the other if he was not interested in philosophical distinctions. In this same section there are several references to the abstract *fortuna*. In the same book (pr. VII) Boethius almost suggests the "Christian Fortune"; that is, fortune is governed by God and is not so haphazard after all—or, not so different from fate. Again, in the passage with the figure of the wheel, Fate seems particularly changeable.

In the Old French poem, Fortune was wanted rather than Fate because she was more familiar; because she was needed in another place for the "conventional" treatment; and because she was useful for the emphasis on the *changeable* element. Fortune and the wheel were the usual combination in poetry: let it be "sa roe" once more. If the wheel-figure of Boethius were very well known, real power came into the lines:

Fuye dont l'extremite telle,
Et pense de vertu ensuivre.

The poet could, of course, find the passage in Jean de Meun's translation of Boethius.

While this discussion disagrees with Mr. Galpin's interpretation of the Old French treatment, it does not in the least derogate from the uniqueness of the example in Old French poetry.

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 ATALAYA DE LA VIDA HUMANA

"Esto mismo le sucedió á este mi pobre libro, que habiéndolo entitulado: Atalaya de la vida humana, dieron en llamarle Pícaro, y no se conoce ya por otro nombre." These words occur in the second part of Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (libro I, cap. VI), and their meaning has long been a subject of conjecture. It does not seem likely that Alemán can be referring to an edition earlier than that of Várez de Castro, Madrid, 1599; consequently, some other explanation must be sought.